

In Two Places at Once: The Impact of Caring Responsibilities on Academics' Conference Participation

Final Project Report

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Contents

Contents	3
Acknowledgements	4
About this report	5
Who is this report for?	5
Accompanying resources	5
Executive Summary	6
I: Introduction to the ‘In Two Places at Once’ project	10
I.i Introduction	10
I.ii Project structure and timeline	11
I.iii Key concepts	12
II: Conferences and caring responsibilities – existing evidence	14
II.i Care and the academic profession	14
II.ii Academic mobility and care	15
II.iii Conferences	15
III: Research design and study information	16
III.i Research design and methodology	16
III.ii Study participants	17
IV: Project findings	18
IV.i The impact of caring responsibilities on academics’ conference participation: key factors	18
IV.ii Access to conferences: challenges and strategies	22
IV.iii Participation in conferences: challenges and strategies	23
IV.iv National versus international conference travel: challenges and strategies	26
V: Recommendations	28
V.i For conference organizers (within HEIs and academic associations)	28
V.ii For higher education institutions	29
V.iii For academics with caring responsibilities	30
V.iv For future research	30
References	31
Appendices	34
Appendix 1: Stakeholder Group	34
Appendix 2: Project Outputs	35
Illustrations	
“Care name tags” (by Emily F. Henderson) – front cover and section headers	
“In Two Places at Once” (by Rhiannon Nichols)	6
“Welcome to the Conference” (by Rhiannon Nichols)	20
“My conference bubble popped” (by Rhiannon Nichols)	24
“11 Missed Calls” (by Rhiannon Nichols)	26

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About this report

Who is this report for?

Higher education institutions

- human resources personnel
- equality, diversity and inclusion teams
- academic managers and heads of department
- *To address hidden inequalities in access to research culture through the development and implementation of more inclusive policy.*

Conference organisers

- in higher education institutions
- in academic associations and societies
- *To improve inclusivity in the logistics and scheduling of conferences.*

Academics with caring responsibilities

- inclusive of all types of caring responsibility
- inclusive of all types of academic contract, including students
- *To encourage further discussion of the challenges and strategies involved in accessing conferences.*

Researchers working in the areas of higher education, equity and/or care

- *To include issues relating to conferences and care in future research.*

Accompanying resources for the project

In addition to the project report, the following project resources can also be accessed/downloaded from www.warwick.ac.uk/i2po:

- **Policy briefing** with recommendations for conference organisers
- **Recommendations postcard** for higher education institutions' human resources teams and department chairs
- **Short project film** to raise awareness of the issue of conferences and caring responsibilities.

Executive Summary

Rationale

The study departs from the perspective that conferences are important but neglected research sites. Equality and diversity studies of the academic profession tend to focus on issues of care in relation to higher education institutions, rather than professional spaces that academics circulate in outside of their 'home' institution/s. Studies of care and the academic profession and/or mobility seldom focus on conferences. Therefore this study fills a gap in knowledge about academics, care and conferences.



Conferences come to represent a particular type of challenge for care, because they are interruptions to the care routine. Challenges relating to care and conferences can involve the challenges of being accompanied to the conference and managing the dual role of care-giver and conference attendee, and/or ensuring that ongoing care support is provided at home during the conference.

The study

The project focused on how academics' caring responsibilities affect their attendance of and participation in conferences. The project was a small-scale, qualitative, exploratory study adopting a diary-interview methodology where 20 participants collected data on one case-study conference and then compared this with more general conference attendance. Nine additional participants collected diary data only. Participants were predominantly women. A range of disciplines and countries were represented. To qualify for participation, participants had to be attending a conference (of at least one day) during the research period, and have at least one caring responsibility.

This project involved two phases. Phase 1 (March-June 2017) involved data collection and preliminary analysis, consultation with the project's Stakeholder Group on the methodology and research tools, and a meeting with the group to discuss the early findings and implications. The project stakeholder group comprised representatives of academic associations who organize conferences, and researchers who work on issues of care and academia. Phase 2 (March-June 2018) involved in-depth analysis, the production of the report, the design of the policy briefing for conference organisers and the recommendations for higher education institutions (HEIs), and the production of the short film.

Key concepts

The term **‘academics’** in this project was used loosely to include academics (i.e. faculty members), researchers, teachers in Higher Education and students; participants could self-define as academics.

‘Care’ in this project was conceptualised in a broad way, to include children, partners, and other relatives, pets, friends and kin.

The study used a flexible definition of **‘conference’** in order to widen the options for participants, defining a conference as an event of one day or more, and not stipulating distance travelled.

Findings

The study findings are presented in four sections: key factors affecting the impact of caring responsibilities on academics’ conference participation; challenges and strategies for accessing conferences; challenges and strategies for participating in conferences; international conference travel.

Key factors affecting the impact of caring responsibilities on academics’ conference participation

- Conferences affect academics for more than just a few days:
 - Conferences are part of an ongoing negotiation about work commitments and caring responsibilities;
 - Each conference entails significant preparatory and catch-up work.
- Academics are situated within complex care constellations:
 - Care constellations involve different degrees of care and care support;
 - Care is dynamic and shifting and is unlikely to be the same from one conference to the next;
 - Academic mobility impacts care and conferences due to distance from care support and likelihood of dual career couples to need to engage in simultaneous mobility (including conference travel).
- Questions of ‘is it worth it?’ impact conference participation:
 - Despite the upheaval, academics on balance felt that conferences were worth it, for professional and intellectual reasons.

Access to conferences: challenges and strategies

- Access to conferences was strongly affected by the availability of flexible care support, eg. family assistance.
- Access to conferences was also affected by the complexity of participants’ care constellations. The more people involved, the higher the possibility that something could come up to prevent the academic attending the conference.
- Participants were strategic in their pre-planning for attending conferences.

Participation in conferences: challenges and strategies

- Ensuring that an academic has made it through the door of the conference is not enough – this does not mean that they will be able to benefit from the conference to maximum effect.
- Unforeseen incidents highlighted the fragility of conference participation for participants.
- Academics' participation in conferences often involved missing parts of the conference, and academics were also distracted during the conference.
- Participants' strategies for managing care alongside the conference often revolved around internet-based communication.
- Participants also creatively use technology to share the experience with those at home.
- All of these strategies become challenges if there is patchy internet connection, or no Wi-Fi in parts of the venue.

International conference travel

- Jet-lag is one of issues involved in international conference travel that were problematic for participants, as this extended their recovery time and prolonged catch-up work.
- International travel is perceived as risky in terms of getting back home in case of an emergency.
- However travelling back from a remote part of the same country was considered more challenging than eg. travelling from a city airport in a neighbouring country to the home city airport.
- International conference travel added expense, increased the need for a foolproof plan for care arrangements, and appeared as a psychological barrier to conference attendance.

Recommendations

The report ends with four sets of recommendations, for conference organisers; HEIs (HR teams and department chairs); academics with caring responsibilities; researchers.

The key recommendation for **conference organisers** is to develop a care-friendly policy for conferences. Conferences can become more care-friendly through improved scheduling practices (eg. running to time), financial support (eg. bursaries), support offered at the conference (eg. childcare and reliable WiFi), and support for those unable to attend in person (eg. live-streaming).

The key recommendation for **higher education institutions** is to create an institutional care-friendly policy for inclusive conference access. **Human Resources and Equality, Diversity and Inclusion teams** can conduct an audit of existing policy and check the existing policy for inclusivity. They can also offer a care bursary. **Department chairs** should ensure they are aware of institutional policy and that this is communicated to

the department, and that colleagues are supported in attending conferences and likewise supported if they are unable to attend conferences.

Recommendations for **academics with caring responsibilities** include checking institutional policies, giving feedback on policies which are found to be exclusionary, seeking mentoring support and joining a parents/carers network.

Recommendations for **future research** include generating more evidence on the individual and institutional benefits of conferences. Further knowledge is required on existing policies and the implementation of these policies, as well as differences between disciplines, institution types, country contexts and care constellations. Moreover this area of study requires a further analysis of how gender operates in relation to care and conferences, and how gender intersects with eg. race, faith, dis/ability.



I: Introduction to the 'In Two Places at Once' project

This report provides an overview of the work undertaken for, and findings and recommendations from the project 'In Two Places at Once: The Impact of Caring Responsibilities on Academics' Conference Participation' (www.warwick.ac.uk/i2po).

I.i Introduction

The project focuses on conferences as a specific facet of the academic profession because equality and diversity studies of the academic profession tend to focus on issues of care in relation to higher education institutions (HEIs), rather than professional spaces that academics circulate in outside of their 'home' institution/s. While conferences may seem to form a relatively minor part of an academic's work, they are well known to be vital sites for career progression, networking and intellectual engagement. As such, issues of access to and participation in conferences should form part of the wider equality agenda in higher education. This study fills a gap in knowledge of how caring responsibilities impact on academics' ability to both attend conferences and fully participate in conferences when they are there.

'In Two Places at Once' is a small-scale, exploratory study which aimed to explore how academics' caring responsibilities intersect with their attendance of and participation in conferences. In spite of the small-scale nature of the project – or indeed because of the detail permitted by the size of the study – the project has produced important insights into the challenges that academics with caring responsibilities face when attending conferences, both in relation to their home institutions and during conference participation itself. The study provides evidence of these challenges and has also produced recommendations for conference organisers, HEIs, academics with caring responsibilities and researchers.

The aims of the 'In Two Places at Once' project were -

1. To review existing research on and knowledge of academic conferences, caring responsibilities, and how conferences are understood in terms of academic mobility.
2. To generate evidence on how academics' caring responsibilities intersect with their attendance of and participation in conferences, and furthermore to produce recommendations to support academics in this position.

The key research question posed for this study was –

‘How do academics’ caring responsibilities affect their attendance of and participation in conferences?’

Within this overarching question, there were the following sub-questions:

1. What are the specific factors of caring responsibilities that impact upon academics’ conference attendance/participation?
2. What are the strategies that academics employ to manage caring responsibilities while attending conferences? (Including support from the academics’ institutions or from conference organisers, as well as other sources of support).
3. Do these factors and strategies differ in relation to international travel for the purpose of attending conferences?

The study involved c. 20 participants from any discipline, anywhere in the world. Participants were recruited using social media and email lists on the basis of (i) attending a conference (of at least one day) during the research period (April-June 2017), and (ii) having at least one caring responsibility. Before attending the conference, participants were sent a time-log questionnaire to complete during and just after the conference, on which they recorded their interactions with caring responsibilities and co-carers during the conference. After the conference, participants were interviewed (by Skype or face to face) about their chosen conference, and their conference participation in general.

This report provides information on the project structure and timeline, key concepts, literature review and methodology, and moves on to discuss project findings and recommendations.

I.ii Project structure and timeline

The project involved two phases.

Phase 1 (March-June 2017) involved data collection and preliminary analysis, culminating in an early findings event at Society for Research into Higher Education (SRHE) premises in London in June 2017. This phase involved consultation with the project’s Stakeholder Group on the methodology and research tools, and a meeting with the group to discuss the early findings and implications. This phase was funded by the Warwick Research Development Fund and included assistance from Julie Mansuy as Research Assistant.

The **Stakeholder Group** was comprised of representatives of academic associations who organise conferences, and researchers who work on issues of care and academia (see appendix 1 for membership). The group took on the role of ensuring that the

project was producing information which could be put to use in a practical sense by academic communities and conference organisers, as well as Higher Education Institutions (HEIs). They have been consulted at key stages of the project, including research design, call for participants, early findings and dissemination.

Phase 2 (March-June 2018) involved in-depth data analysis, the production of the report, the design of the policy briefing for conference organisers and the recommendations postcard for HEIs, and the short film. The phase culminated in a dissemination symposium at the University of Warwick in June 2018. This phase was funded by a Warwick Institute for Advanced Studies Delivering Results grant and included assistance from Xuemeng Cao as Research Assistant.

The **interim period** between the phases was used to produce early outputs, including blog posts, a newsletter article and a book chapter (see appendix 2), and to gain feedback on the project and further recommendations for best practice from a wide range of audiences, including UCL Parents and Carers Together Network, Warwick Carers' Network, Feminist and Women's Studies Association conference, Centre for Higher Education and Equity Research at the University of Sussex, Russell Group Equality Forum, to name just a few (see appendix 2). This report incorporates comments and questions from these events and has been vastly enriched by the ideas and concerns raised by these audiences.

I.iii Key concepts

Academics

This project focused on 'academics' in relation to conference participation. The term was used loosely to include academics (i.e. faculty members), researchers, teachers in Higher Education and students; participants could self-define as academics.

The study did not include professional services, as the study particularly focused on the role of conferences in academics' career trajectories, where conferences play a strong role in building an individual's reputation, networks and intellectual endeavour. However there are also important overlaps with professional services and other industries, and these overlaps require further exploration for the sharing of best practice.

The study conceptualized academics as nodes in a network of relationships, rather than as unfettered individuals, which has been the traditional way of portraying academics. In this way, all academics were considered to have some caring responsibilities, and to occupy different locations within a spectrum of care.

Caring responsibilities

In this project, 'care' is conceptualised in a broad way, to include children, parents and other relatives, pets, friends and kin. It was important to the ethos of the study that

participants could self-define as having caring responsibilities. Most of the studies on the academic profession and care focus on parenthood; the aim of this study was to explore a range of caring responsibilities in relation to conference participation. The call for participants did not specifically mention 'self-care', which is currently an important concept in research on the academic profession. However self-care did emerge in a number of participants' accounts, in relation to conferences as opportunities to engage in self-care, and also as detracting from participants' well-being.

The term 'caring responsibilities', while it is frequently used in the area of care research and practice, is not a neutral term. Some of the feedback from audience members attending presentations on this project has suggested that this is a rather negative term, which seems to particularly gesture towards dependents and even has connotations of 'burden'. Through the study itself and subsequent feedback, it has become clear that there are a variety of interpretations of the term, and likewise with the terms 'carer' and 'care-giver'. Some participants did not feel that some of their relationships qualified as 'caring responsibilities', because for instance there was a mutual exchange of care; others did not feel that the term excluded mutual care. In this study the term is understood as potentially including any relationship where care is involved, with recognition that there are significant differences between caring relationships, with some involving more physical and/or emotional labour than others.

Conferences

The study used a flexible definition of 'conference' in order to widen the scope for participation. As such the study defined a conference as an event of one day or more, and did not stipulate distance travelled. This flexibility was necessary because some caring responsibilities or care arrangements only allow for very minimal participation in events of this kind (and we are aware of some academics who are unable to attend any conferences). Because participation in the study required participation in a conference, it was essential to make this requirement as inclusive as possible. Some participants used a one-day conference on their own university campus as the conference they discussed for the research. While there were some similarities with a 'normal' work day, there were also key differences around timings, flexibility to take calls, and social expectations. These participants' accounts provided valuable insights into the differences between conferences and 'normal' campus-based academic work.

The study stipulated 'conference' rather than seminar, meeting or training day because of the specific role of conferences in academics' careers. Some participants discussed these other forms of event or work-based travel in their interviews, and there are clear overlaps between them, but conferences are also distinctive in the nature of the interactions and the expectations placed on attendees (including by themselves). Conferences appeared in the interviews as part-work, part-play, as an intellectual treat as well as a work obligation. Participants' decisions to attend conferences were mediated through this hybrid status, which was often layered with

guilt and confusion as well as some misunderstanding from family members. The dual status of conferences as both optional and obligatory, and the ways in which this status is negotiated in relation to caring responsibilities, clearly marks conferences out as interesting and important sites for further research.



II: Conferences and caring responsibilities – existing evidence

This is to our knowledge the first study focusing exclusively on conferences and caring responsibilities (conceptualised as including but not limited to parenthood). As such the existing evidence is gleaned from a number of different research areas, the most relevant of which are presented in this section of the report.

II.i Care and the academic profession

The academic profession has been conceptualized as ‘care-free’, or without caring responsibilities, and ‘care-less’, or uncaring (Grummell, Devine and Lynch, 2009; Moreau and Robertson, 2017; Hook, 2016). The ‘ideal’ academic that this demanding, individualistic profession constructs has traditionally been seen as a single man, or a man in a one-career family (Moreau and Robertson, 2017). Although the academic workforce now appears to be somewhat more open to women and non-binary academics, the system itself is critiqued as being gendered towards the traditional masculine norm (Leathwood and Read, 2009; Morley, 2014). The implication of this is that the expectations placed on academics by their role and institution have an inherently gendered quality – and, importantly for this study, an assumption of a footloose, care-free life.

The academic profession has perhaps unfairly gained a reputation for flexibility of working hours and patterns. While this may to an extent be true (and this depends on institution, role, contract, country context...), there is a parallel expectation of constant work (Angervall, Erlandson and Gustafsson, 2018; Dorenkamp and Süß, 2017). There are aspects of academic work that are considered to be ‘lucky’ or ‘cushy’, such as reading, writing, travel and including conferences (Henderson, 2018; Tobolovsky and Reynolds, 2017). This belies the increasing surveillance, monitoring and accountability surrounding academic knowledge production globally. While academics may seem to be relatively free and flexible, research has shown that academics’ lives tend to be experienced *through* work (for example experiencing a music festival over the top of a laptop screen [de Carvalho, 2013]). This also applies to care, where for example academics who are living/working in this mode consider

parental leave as an ideal opportunity to produce research (Ward and Wolf-Wendel, 2012). This hyper-productive mode is in many ways impossible to sustain through looking after caring responsibilities, particularly when higher education systems are far from progressive in their leave policies, and studies have shown that many academics with caring responsibilities (often women) leave academia or adjust their ambitions (ibid.).

II.ii Academic mobility and care

The academic profession is increasingly promoting mobility as a criterion of academic excellence, within the internationalization agenda (Herschberg, Benschop and van den Brink, 2016). The mobility imperative varies widely between and within different contexts, but it is difficult to deny its prevalence on a global scale. The mobility imperative creates an enhanced construction of the footloose, care-free academic (Parker and Weik, 2014), who is able to make repeated geographical moves to ‘follow the job’. Importantly for this study, mobility includes both longer-term moves and shorter-term travel, and the two are intertwined (Fahey and Kenway, 2010). In a profession where success depends heavily on connections, shorter-term travel (including conferences) can act as a means of paving the way for other forms of mobility. Researchers have discussed academic mobility as a gendered phenomenon, where women academics have historically (Jöns, 2011) and still do access fewer mobility opportunities than men academics (Leemann, 2010), and a major part of this is the perseverance of gendered norms of care. The research question for ‘In Two Places at Once’ that focused on international travel was particularly targeted at conference mobility as feeding into the mobility imperative more generally. However it is also necessary to note that academic mobility operates at different scales within and between borders (Kim, 2009; Morley et al, 2017; Storme et al., 2017), and this study also explored travel and distance as relative concepts which are modified by academics’ perceptions of what counts as appropriate and responsible care-related behaviour.

II.iii Conferences

Conferences are an under-researched area within higher education studies (Henderson, 2015). Studies of care and the academic profession and/or mobility seldom focus on conferences (Henderson, forthcoming), but there are accounts of conferences within these studies. Conferences come to represent a particular type of challenge for care, because they are interruptions to the care routine. Longer term mobility necessitates the formation of a new care routine (Loveridge, Doyle and Faamanatu-Eteuati, 2017; Schnurr, Zayts and Hopkins, 2016); likewise commuting provides a basis for a regular care routine (Ralph, 2015; Willis et al., 2017). However conferences are short, they do not happen regularly in the same sense as commuting, and they tend to be in different places each time. This means that each conference requires a tailor-made solution for caring responsibilities – and furthermore, given the

dynamic and shifting nature of care (Moreau and Robertson, 2017), the level or type of care to take into consideration is also likely to differ between conferences. Challenges relating to care and conferences can involve the challenges of being accompanied to the conference eg. by a child (Lipton, 2018; Hook, 2016) or partner (Yoo, McIntosh, and Cockburn-Wootten, 2016) and managing the dual role of caregiver and conference attendee, and/or ensuring that ongoing care support is provided at home during the conference (Henderson, forthcoming). In either case, this can lead to a sense of being ‘in two places at once’.



III: Research design and study information

III.i Research design and methodology

‘In Two Places at Once’ was a small-scale, qualitative, exploratory study, which aimed to produce initial findings and evidence on an under-researched topic. The study set out to discover the impact of caring responsibilities on both access to and participation in conferences. The study used a version of the diary-interview method (Bartlett, 2012; Filep et al., 2017; Harvey, 2011; Milligan, 2005), where participants kept a solicited diary (i.e. a diary that was specifically produced for research, as opposed to a personal diary) and then this diary provided the prompts for a subsequent interview. Most qualitative studies of care in academia use interviews to collect data on this topic, but this risks producing over-generalised data in relation to specific aspects of care, such as conferences. This is particularly a risk with conferences, given the difficulty of establishing a care routine for conferences (see II.iii), and the resultant difficulty of generalising about this in an interview context. The diary-interview method allowed participants to focus on the detail of one case study conference, and this generated extremely rich data about the everyday management of care alongside academic work.

Each participant was asked to focus on their experiences of attending one conference, and to complete a time-log questionnaire during the day/s of the conference to record their interactions with/thoughts about caring responsibilities and/or others involved in care provision. This log also included space for preparation for and catch-up from conference travel. The interviews were then conducted within the week following each participant’s conference, and interviews in general lasted for an hour. The interviews included discussion of the time-log questionnaire, and also a discussion of participants’ conference attendance in general. The function of the single case study conference was then as a means of comparing the specific with the general.

III.ii Study participants

Following the issuing of the call for participants, 20 diary-interview participants were recruited on a first come, first served basis. The level of response was so high (Henderson, 2017) that the remaining academics who contacted us were invited to just fill in the time-log questionnaire, as the project did not have the resources for the interviewing and transcribing of further interviews. Nine academics chose to participate in this manner. The full sample of time-log questionnaires was therefore 29. In researching academics, there are important ethical considerations surrounding reputation and recognisability, as academics can be understood as semi-public or at times public figures. Given the sensitivity and silence surrounding care issues in HEIs, where academics may not wish managers to be aware of their struggles with professional obligations, every effort has been made to conceal participants' identities. As such, little identifying information is given about each participant in this report and other project outputs. This is particularly important as in some cases participants would be easily identifiable by providing details of their specific mobility trajectories, disciplinary orientation, and/or caring responsibilities in combination.

Almost all participants who volunteered were women (19/20 interviewees and 8/9 questionnaire respondents) but this is not uncommon for research studies on care with participants who self-select as having caring responsibilities. This is an important consideration for future research in this area, which could for example use a case-study approach to research a department or unit in order to include a wider variety of genders and care profiles.

For 20 of the total 29 participants, the UK was the country of residence, but the sample also included Australia (5), US (2), Austria (1), Canada (1). Conference destinations were UK (13) Australia (3), US (3), Canada (2), and one each in Denmark, France, Germany, Japan, Kuwait, Portugal, South Africa and Sweden; 18 participants attended conferences within their country of residence, and 11 crossed international border/s.

Conferences varied from one day to six days; 3 days was the mode (12 participants). Participants included one full-time carer (resuming work as a lecturer later in 2017), doctoral students (6) and doctoral students with parallel roles (5), research associates (4), as well as lecturers/assistant professors (4), senior lecturers/associate professors (3), readers and full professors (6).

Caring responsibilities stated on the time-log questionnaire primarily included children (25 participants), animals (9 participants), partners (6 participants), parents (5 participants), but also included a sibling, a friend, and a children's club. However it is necessary to note that many participants added extra caring responsibilities into the time-log and the interview, and that the primary responsibilities declared on the form are a reflection of participants' interpretations of the term 'caring responsibility'.

Furthermore, several participants listed as primary caring responsibilities a combination of two (8 participants) or three (5 participants) of the above categories.



IV: Project findings

IV.i The impact of caring responsibilities on academics' conference

participation: key factors

More than just a few days

Conferences may seem to affect academics for one or just a few days, but in fact the effects are spread beyond the days of the conference itself in two ways.

Firstly, each conference forms **part of an ongoing negotiation with caring responsibilities and with other care-givers**. This negotiation includes other conferences that have been attended or missed, as well as other work commitments that are not part of a 'normal' work day, such as seminars, open days and training courses. In the study, participants discussed their processes of bargaining with themselves and those close to them as to why attending a particular conference was necessary or 'worth it', and whether they were 'owed' a conference. This process of negotiation was embroiled in emotional guilt, financial considerations and practical considerations about eg. care support. In some cases, participants were already engaging in negotiations about future conferences or commitments while at the conference. In one case, the participant's partner arranged a leisure trip for himself after the conference 'in return' for having taking on solo care during the conference.

Secondly, each conference entailed **preparatory work** before the conference and **catch-up work** after the conference.

Participants tended to engage in **intensive preparations** in the week before the conference, including putting into place support and back-up plans, preparing schedules for eg. pick-up and drop-off arrangements, extra-curricular activities etc., and preparing food and clothes for the duration of the conference. It is important to note that these preparations had two functions. Firstly, they were necessitated by **practical reasons**, particularly regarding care-related tasks that were normally enacted by the person attending the conference, where the other care-givers did not necessarily know the usual routine or where certain items were kept. Secondly, these

tasks were part of academics' pre-conference ritual, and as such formed part of their **complicated negotiation of care versus work**. Many participants stated that they bore the 'mental load' of care-work in their households, but felt very ambivalent about this. They both resented this organisational control and also felt unable to relinquish control. This refers to the women participants; the interview participant who identified as a man felt that his partner, a woman, constructed him as helpless, and he in turn found it difficult to fully participate in sharing the mental load.

This double-faceted organisation also applied to the days after the conference, where many participants returned home and set about '**putting things right**'.

Again this seemed to be a dual process of **sorting things out** that had not been done well or mess that had been created, and of viewing the sorting out as a means **of re-entering the family sphere** and family power relations. Added to this was a common feeling of needing to **make amends** for going away. This not only involved immediately resuming normal caring duties (often upon entering the home), but also included taking on extra duties to 'make up for' going away. This practice relates to the issue of conferences not being fully seen as work, either by academics and/or co-carers. Participants often felt guilty for what they perceived to have been as a 'break', and, even though they also professed themselves to be exhausted from an intensive work experience, they still felt unable to claim time to recover.

"When I was in the run-up to this conference...I was really noticing that I was doing a lot of feelings work. I could have walked out the door on zero notice and everyone would have gotten fed, the laundry would have been done, I would come home to a mostly clean house, but usually I can go and it's not a big deal on the emotional caretaking front either, but it was a lot of work... It wasn't like I was like, 'Oh, let me make a bunch of meals', it was a lot of, 'Let me listen to you and care for you and try and predict what you need'"

(P20, whose partner's relative was diagnosed with cancer shortly before the conference)

Care constellations

Care in relation to higher education is often understood as referring to childcare. However the detailed exploration of academics' lives that was produced by the case-study conference approach allowed for a much more complex perspective on caring relationships. The time-log questionnaire included a question where participants were asked to state their caring responsibilities. This is the data that studies of care usually elicit, but the methodology employed for this study resulted in two further layers being added to this initial answer, via the time-log and then the interview. It became clear that, while there were often one or just a few caring responsibilities who were fully dependent on participants, all participants were situated within **complex care constellations**. These constellations comprised different degrees of care and also of care support. In some cases, co-carers were also caring responsibilities, eg. where parents were elderly or partners were unwell. Some constellations were very compact,

for example a solo parent who is accompanied to the conference by their one child. Others were multi-layered and included children, pets, partner, parents, and more distant care enactment eg. of family members via social media.



"Welcome to the conference" by Rhiannon Nichols

As emphasized in the Moreau and Robertson (2017) report on academic careers and care, **care is dynamic and shifting**. In multiple cases, there were eventualities that occurred near the time of the conference – or during the conference – which changed the nature of participants' constellations. For example, prior to one conference, a participant's mother was diagnosed with breast cancer; another participant discovered that her elderly aunt only had a few days to live, and while at the conference she began to organize a trip to visit her the following weekend. Furthermore, participants were obliged to adjust their care arrangements for each conference, as often what had worked before would not necessarily work again, particularly with young children. While at one conference breastfeeding was an issue, at a subsequent conference a different strategy was needed for a different issue.

Care constellations were also impacted by **academic mobility**. This impacted participants in two ways – firstly, some participants had **relocated** to other parts of the country or to other countries entirely. This meant that they were removed from

“Probably she was not very happy because she doesn’t speak English, and has a lot of troubles to get accustomed to different culture here. But from another side she was happy to see [her grandchild]” (P19, whose mother travelled to look after P19’s child while she was at a conference)

immediate care support from family. In two cases the care arrangements put in place during the conference involved international travel for family members to ensure care was in place. In other cases the relocation meant that they could only rely on formal care provision for support, which was by nature more expensive and less flexible. The second issue related to **dual career mobility** and **short-term mobility**, where the participant was attending a conference at the same time as their partner was also travelling for work. This occurred where a participant’s partner

was on a one-month visiting fellowship when she needed to attend a conference; in another case the participant’s partner was on a research trip in another country and time zone while she was at the conference, which made communications between them difficult.

Is it worth it?

A third general finding relating to how we understand the impact of caring responsibilities on academics’ conference attendance relates to the question of ‘**is it worth it?**’ I asked this question to each participant relating to the conference they had attended. In most cases participants had expended significant energy and time on attending the conference, often to the detriment of their own wellbeing. The question therefore arose of why they were nonetheless prepared to disrupt the care routine to attend conferences. In most cases, participants felt that it was worth it, even if it was at times a fine balance.

Reasons for why it was worth it included that conferences are useful for participants’ **research**, including presenting on ongoing work and receiving feedback, as well as attending other sessions and engaging in informal conversations. Participants felt that they were often torn between work and care, and that they were rarely immersed in a research-specific space. Conferences were therefore a valuable space for thinking and for engaging in the latest research in the field. There were differences in participants’ accounts on the respective value of different conference activities. Giving a presentation seemed to be considered an obligation, and this may be owing to

“In our department, [attending this conference] it’s like dead or alive” (P16)

“This one was particularly useful to really help my thinking in terms of analysis” (P12)

“I don’t know [if it’s worth it] and I think this has been part of my withdrawal from conferences” (P15)

the fact that much conference funding is tied to presenting, but some participants (particularly the doctoral students) were attending conferences without given presentations, to listen and learn. Some participants emphasized the importance of networking at conferences, particularly because they could not attend as many as they did before their current care situation, and some chose to attend personal networking appointments at the expense of attending presentations.

Participants also discussed conferences as important spaces for their **professional identities**, where conferences are understood as assisting with career development. This was particularly the case for academics who were struggling to maintain a sense of a professional identity during their everyday work-care negotiations. For some academics who had recently completed parental leave or care-related leave, conferences acted as testing grounds for re-immersion in the academic profession – testing grounds both in terms of the identity still holding, and in terms of the care arrangements working out. Finally, in some cases attending a particular conference was a department requirement (formal or informal), and as such not attending would have been considered a transgression rather than a missed opportunity.

Finally, as mentioned above, participants engaged in **self-care** at conferences. Self-care practices included following a less regimented regime, sleeping more or going to bed late, spending time socializing in the evening.

In addition to the cost-benefit analysis that individuals engage in to decide which conferences to attend, where and when, **institutional benefits** are also a consideration. This is a key consideration for institutional policymakers who are involved in equity policy. Perhaps because the value derived from conferences is often indirect and unpredictable, there seems to be an ambivalence in terms of institutional support in general, and this carries across to support for academics with caring responsibilities. This means that there are hidden inequalities in terms of who is accessing which conferences, and the indirect benefits are accruing on an unequal basis. The findings from this study support the recommendation that HEIs need to include conferences in their equity policies.

IV.ii Access to conferences: challenges and strategies

Access to conferences was strongly affected by the **availability of flexible support**. Because attending conferences generally entailed an alteration to existing care routines, even in the case of one-day conferences on campus, extra support that could be called upon was absolutely key to the issue of access. Indeed relying on just one source of support was often insufficient; participants expressed complex layers of emergency plans, which included tapping into an economy of favours and imagining different potential scenarios in advance of the conference. Single parents/carers and academics who were affected by academic mobility were particularly vulnerable in this regard, as they had limited sources of flexible and back-up support. Relying on

formal childcare or pet-care posed extra challenges as last-minute changes to conference schedules or late event announcements meant that participants missed opportunities through being unable to alter their plans.

Access to conferences was also affected by the **complexity of participants' care constellations**. The more caring responsibilities and care-givers involved, the higher the possibility that something would come up to prevent the academic attending the conference. In cases where participants had multiple caring responsibilities of different kinds, and where co-carers were also caring responsibilities (eg. where elderly parents were caring for children), more planning was involved beforehand, and yet the plans also had a higher probability of not working out. There was a contradictory streak to these participants' accounts, where they went to huge lengths to get all the plans in place, but also were resigned to the fact that they may not be able to attend after all, or may have to leave early.

"We got sent an email saying, 'Oh, by the way, we're launching the monograph in the evening; it would be lovely if you could all stay for that.' And I just thought, 'Well, bollocks to that. I've got to get back for the dogs.' So those sorts of [social/extra] things, if people suddenly spring that on you, which I think is incredibly poor practice, then it rules those sorts of things out." (P13)

Participants were strategic in their **pre-planning for conferences**. They participated in favour economies with relatives and friends in the knowledge that they may need to make use of them; they minimized the impact of their absence on their co-carers by increasing their labour before and after the conference so as to be able to attend future conferences; they negotiated with co-carers as to what was reasonable and what they felt obligated to do professionally; they created complicated schedules and plans that would cover as many eventualities as possible, to ensure the smoothness of the operation during their absence.

IV.iii Participation in conferences: challenges and strategies

The time-log questionnaire data and subsequent interviews revealed valuable insights into academics' experiences of managing care while they are at conferences. **Ensuring that an academic has made it through the door of the conference is not enough** – this does not mean that they will be able to benefit from the conference to maximum effect.

Unforeseen incidents were rife in participants' accounts of the conferences they had recorded for this study. Most accounts included at least one unforeseen incident, including a bike puncture on the way to school, a dog needing medical attention, and a family feud. These incidents either happened to participants eg. on the morning of

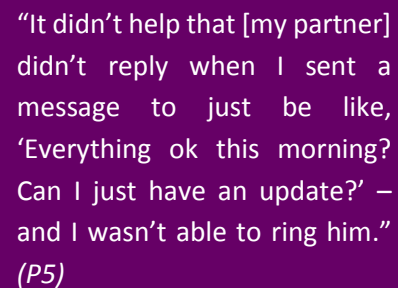
departure, or were communicated to them via technological devices during their absence. On several occasions participants became involved with dealing with the incident through virtual contact. The unforeseen incidents – and the prevalence of these incidents – highlighted the fragility of conference participation for participants. Particularly the disruption to the usual care routine, and the unfamiliarity of the temporary care arrangements seemed to lead to a high probability of something going awry. It also seemed that, particularly where participants were using the conference as a testing ground for eg. returning to work after care-related leave, having a smooth conference experience had extra significance. This in turn placed extra pressure on both the participant and the care support for everything to work, and it seemed as though some participants were so aware of the fragility that it did not take a large incident to ‘pop their conference bubble’.



“My conference bubble popped” by Rhiannon Nichols

Academics’ participation in conferences often involved **missing parts of the conference**. This occurred in two different ways. Firstly, academics literally **missed sessions or days** because of needing to provide care, either physically or virtually. Academics shaved off the start and end of conferences in order to reduce the amount of time spent away. One academic travelled overnight from Europe to North America and went straight into the conference in order to not spend an extra night away. They also took decisions to miss social and/or formal parts of the conference to eg. join in with a meal-time on Skype.

Secondly, participants' conference participation was affected by **being 'in two places at once' in their minds**. Participants discussed feeling distracted during sessions by wondering if the care arrangements were working out. At times, participants' minds turned to care because they were not particularly interested in the session they were attending. At other times, they found they were unable to concentrate because of eg. waiting for a message to confirm that a pick-up arrangement had worked out. This was a form of 'active inaction' where participants were unable to do anything but wait for confirmation, but they nonetheless felt anxious and responsible in those moments.

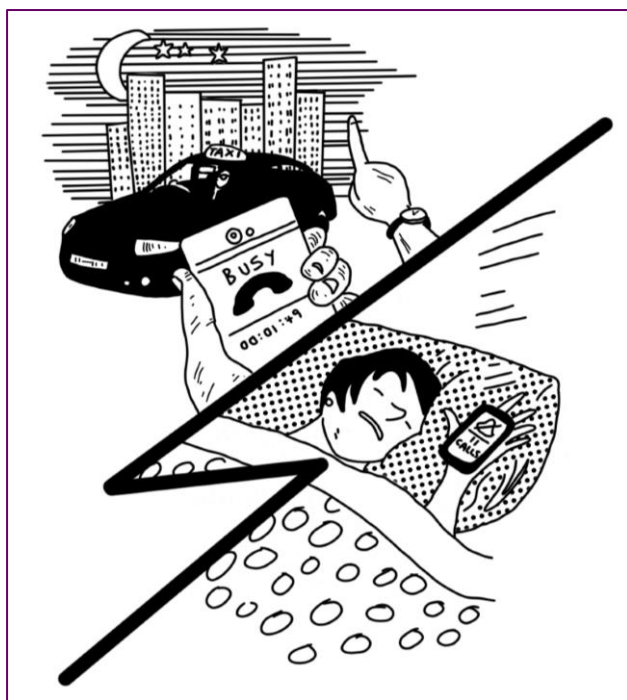


"It didn't help that [my partner] didn't reply when I sent a message to just be like, 'Everything ok this morning? Can I just have an update?' – and I wasn't able to ring him."
(P5)

Participants' strategies for managing care alongside the conference often revolved around **internet-based communication and/or telephone**. Communication of this kind was used to perform '**check-ups**', which are planned and spontaneous contact points during the day. Often planned, longer 'check-ups' occurred at the beginning and/or the end of the day. At times this involved joining in with eg. breakfast. More perfunctory 'check-ups' happened during breaks and between sessions, often by text or a chat function. 'Check-ups' were used to keep in touch with those at home, to check that the planned arrangements were going smoothly. They also maintained contact with home in an emotional sense, in that they seemed to assuage participants' anxiety about being away (and the wrench of leaving family behind). Longer planned check-ups were also used as mutual sources of support, where participants would also discuss the conference with eg. their partner.

It is important to note that formal presentation slots were not usually considered the right time for 'check-ups'; breaks and transition times between sessions, as well as after-hours social events, were used by participants for this purpose. However this means that **participants are potentially missing out on important networking opportunities**, and shows a leaning towards prioritizing formal sessions as the least interruptible points of a conference.

Participants also used technological devices to pre-empt unforeseen incidents. This resulted in a number of different **technology-monitoring strategies**, where participants maintained an 'absent presence' (Willis et al., 2017). This included participants keeping their phones in their bags and checking at intervals, keeping phones in their laps, or face up or face down on the table, emulating others' phone use to establish an acceptable norm and linking the phone to a sports watch which vibrates when a message comes in. One participant used a phone application service provided by her child's nursery, which was updated with eg. whether her child had eaten lunch. Participants engaging in these strategies trod a fine line between monitoring technology *in order to relax into the conference* and thinking so much



"11 Missed Calls" by Rhiannon Nichols

about whether there was anything to monitor via technology that they were *unable to be fully at the conference*.

A final strategy to mention is the **creative use of technology to share the experience** with those at home. A small number of participants engaged in highly creative strategies to share the conference with their families in positive ways. A number of participants took photos of elements of the conference, the venue and the food to share with those back at home, and used these to illustrate their conversations. One participant sent

a photo of the cakes set out for afternoon tea and created an interactive game with her child by asking which one she should choose. Another participant engaged extensively in this type of contact. She and her partner used Slack to communicate with each other and also a close group of friends. While at the conference, she sent several selfies for her daughter, and her partner printed one for her daughter to see; her daughter then engaged in creative play with the picture, acting out taking her 'paper mommy' to the park. These creative strategies seemed to make being 'in two places at once' a more positive experience.

However it is important to note that all of these **strategies become challenges if there is unreliable internet connection**, or no Wi-Fi in parts of the venue eg. accommodation.

IV.iv National versus international conference travel: challenges and strategies

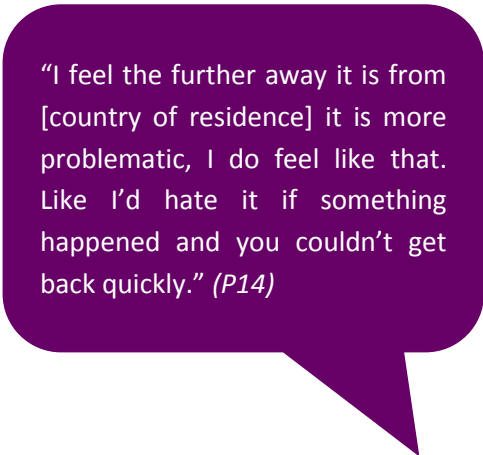
The third research question pertained to the **differences between domestic and international conference travel**. This question was formulated in order to capture specific issues relating to international travel, because international conference travel is particularly important in terms of developing an international reputation, co-authored papers and research collaborations. Some issues did arise from international travel, but it also became clear that ideas of distance are relative, and that this needs examining in its own right.

There were some issues involved in international conference travel that were problematic for participants. One was **jet-lag**, and the difficulty of combining the

catch-up processes with jet-leg, especially if this involves getting up in the night for a young baby, for example. Another was the issue of **time zones**. For some participants, the time difference played into their favour, as they were able to get up early and start the day with their families, or meet them for dinner, because the time difference allowed for this to work with the conference schedule. For others, the time difference reduced the opportunities to perform 'check-ups', and reduced their contactability at key times of day the care arrangements. This both caused further anxiety and, in other cases, gave participants more of a sense of being further away and needing to trust that unforeseen incidents would be taken care of.

The question of **appropriate distance to travel** was highly relative. The main factor relating to this issue is the sense of '**can I get back if something happens?**' In this sense, it would appear that international travel would score as high risk on the 'getting back' measure. However some participants drew a very tight boundary around their region of the country, and the zone beyond was a no-go area for travel, whether national or international; others pointed out that travelling back from a remote part of the same country was at times more challenging than travelling from a city airport in a neighbouring country to their local city airport. Each participant was able to sketch out a verbal map of where they would consider going and where they would not go at this stage of their lives. Some participants used different mindsets for different types of destinations, considering that their presence at local conferences were more fragile because it was easier to decide to come home, while a higher economic cost would be incurred by coming home from an international conference. These maps seemed to form a part of participants' strategies around conference attendance, in that they engaged in a filtering process of which conferences were worth considering.

It is important to note that **international conference travel** added expense, increased the need for a foolproof plan for care arrangements, and appeared as a figurative obstacle in this study. However all conference travel is affected by relative notions of distance and the 'getting back' factor.



"I feel the further away it is from [country of residence] it is more problematic, I do feel like that. Like I'd hate it if something happened and you couldn't get back quickly." (P14)



V: Recommendations

The exploration and discussions undertaken within this project have furthered the understanding of how academics' caring responsibilities intersect with their attendance of and participation in conferences. The following recommendations stem from discussions with participants during the data collection, as well as feedback from a variety of audiences and stakeholders (see appendices 1 and 2). The recommendations are designed to suggest ways in which different stakeholders can positively contribute to academics' conference attendance/participation.

V.i For conference organizers (within HEIs and academic associations)

- **Key recommendation: develop a care-friendly policy for conferences.**

Care-friendly scheduling

- Ensure that the conference **finishes on time**, and that **breaks** are adhered to.
- Consider a **later start time** for the conference.
- Consider holding the conference **within the working day**.
- Ask **how long** the conference needs to be.
- Provide the **information about conference schedule as early as possible**, and **do not change the schedule** at the last minute.

Financial support

- When budgeting for **invited speakers**, consider asking about care-related expenses.
- Allow delegates to pay differently based on the different levels being involved in the conference, eg. **day delegate rate**.
- Offer **care bursaries** for attendees with any caring responsibilities (not just children).

Support at the conference

- Consider including a **field on the registration form for care-related requests**, in the same way as dietary and access requirements are included.
- Ensure that the **WiFi provision** is reliable and easy to access, in the conference venue and in the accommodation (if provided by the conference).
- When exploring venue options, ensure that the **venue allows children** and that a risk assessment has been conducted.
- Consider providing a **crèche** or **contact details for local childcare provision**. However it must be noted that this is not the answer for all parents, and does

not help with other caring responsibilities, so this should not be the single solution adopted.

- Older children cannot use the crèche, so consider **demarcating an area of the conference with verified supervisor/s** that older children can use.
- If the conference is providing accommodation, ensure that **the details of this accommodation do not assume care-free delegates**. For example, if only single rooms are available, can an alternative be suggested for academics who are accompanied by caring responsibilities?
- Consider the **place of pets in a care-friendly conference policy**.

Support for those unable to attend in person

- Consider **live-streaming** the conference and/or including **virtual presentations** and/or **recording parts of the conference** (using eg. lecture capture facilities).
- Virtual conferences do not replicate the networking aspect of conferences, which is arguably as important as the presentations. Consider how to provide **opportunities of networking for delegates attending conferences virtually**, eg. through a chat room or virtual learning environment platform.

V.ii For higher education institutions

- **Key recommendation: create an institutional care-friendly policy for inclusive conference access.**

Recommendations for HR teams

- Conduct an **audit of existing institutional policy** relating to conferences eg. funding, promotion criteria, bursaries and check for care-free assumptions.
- Develop mechanisms for ensuring that **institutional policy is implemented at departmental level**, eg. through department chairs and/or equality and diversity representatives.
- Ensure that a **conference care bursary** scheme is in place, and that this bursary includes all caring responsibilities.
- If a **mentoring scheme** is in place, include the role of advising on conference strategy in the guidance for mentors.
- Are the following **policies** in place?
 - Can academics **claim for care-related costs** when claiming for conference expenses? Does this extend to eg. travel costs for an accompanying person?
 - Can academics **claim in advance** for at least some conference expenses?
 - Is an academic returning from an international conference entitled to a **day off** following their return?
 - If the institution has a **nursery**, is there flexibility in the nursery for **responsive childcare** (eg. using the nursery for extra days during a conference)?

- Are **research students** entitled to the same inclusivity policies as academics?

Recommendations for department chairs

- Ensure you are **aware of institutional policies** relating to conferences, eg. funding, promotion criteria, bursaries, and that these are **communicated to the department**.
- Encourage an **open culture** regarding all caring responsibilities, and ensure that this carries over into **departmental expectations** about conference attendance.
- Support colleagues who **want to attend conferences** despite challenges, and support the development of colleagues who **are unable to attend** many or any conferences.

V.iii For academics with caring responsibilities

- **Check your institution's policies** on eg. claiming conference expenses for accompanying caring responsibilities and care bursaries. You may need to approach the HR and/or Equality, Diversity and Inclusion (EDI) teams for this as your department chair may not be familiar with the detail of the policies.
- If you find that a **policy is exclusionary** (eg. only for children and excluding other caring responsibilities), raise this with HR and EDI.
- Seek **formal/informal mentoring advice** on conference strategy.
- If your institution has a **parents/carers network**, consider joining this to share challenges and strategies.

V.iv For future research

We need to know more about...

- The **in/direct benefits of conferences** to individuals and institutions.
- How conferences intersect with other **equity concerns and institutional accountability**, and whether they are or can be included in equality charter marks eg. ATHENA Swan, the Race Equality Charter Mark (in the UK context). Which **institutional policies** exist and how they are implemented.
- Differences in policy, support and/or implementation between **disciplines, institution types and country contexts**.
- How conferences for **other industries/professions** tackle these issues.
- How different **care constellations** impact upon conference participation. There is an argument for conducting **case-study research** on eg. a department, to encompass a wider range of participants than self-selecting studies have been able to.
- How **gender** and gender intersecting with other **axes of inequality (race, ethnicity, class, faith, nationality, dis/ability, sexuality...)** mediates the experiences of academics with caring responsibilities.

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Appendices

Appendix 1: Stakeholder Group

A key facet of the 'In Two Places at Once' research project was the Stakeholder Group, which was comprised of representatives of academic associations who organise conferences, and researchers who work on issues of care and academia. The role of the Stakeholder Group was to ensure that the project is producing information which could be put to use in a practical sense by academic communities and conference organisers, as well as higher education institutions. They were consulted at key stages of the project, including research design, call for participants, early findings and dissemination.

The membership listed below reflects the original Stakeholder Group at the time of formation in 2017. In some cases, other members of the academic associations have contributed to the project due to shift of roles or other commitments.

Research expertise representative:

Marie-Pierre Moreau, Reader in Sociology of Education and Director of RISE (Research in Inequalities, Societies and Education), University of Roehampton

AoMO: The Art of Management and Organization

Jenna Ward, Senior Lecturer in HRM & Organisational Behaviour, De Montfort University

BAICE: British Association for International and Comparative Education:

Alison Buckler, Research Fellow, Faculty of Wellbeing, Education and Language Studies, The Open University

CHEER: Centre for Higher Education and Equity Research (University of Sussex):

Emily Danvers, Co-director of the Centre for Higher Education and Equity Research (CHEER) at the University of Sussex

FWSA: Feminist and Women's Studies Association, UK and Ireland:

Emily Falconer, Lecturer, Westminster University

GEA: Gender and Education Association

Vanita Sundaram, Senior Lecturer in Education, University of York

SRHE: Society for Research into Higher Education

Rob Gresham, Operations Manager for the Society for Research into Higher Education (SRHE)

Appendix 2: Project Outputs

The following sections list the project outputs until 12th June 2018. More details can be found on the project website, www.warwick.ac.uk/i2po.

Publications

Book chapter

Henderson, E. F. (Forthcoming). 'Academics in Two Places at Once: (Not) Managing Caring Responsibilities at Conferences'. In R. Finkel and B. Sharp (Eds) *Accessibility, Inclusion, and Diversity in Critical Events Studies*. Routledge.

Newsletter article

Henderson, E. F. (2017) 'Caring while Conferencing: the "In Two Places at Once" Research Project', Feminist and Women's Studies Association (UK and Ireland) Newsletter, Issue 68, pp. 11-12, June. ISSN: 1362-475X.

Blog Posts

'Conferences and Complex Care Constellations' (17 July 2017, *Conference Inference*)
<https://conferenceinference.wordpress.com/2017/07/17/conferences-and-complex-care-constellations/>

'Overwhelming Care – Reflections on Recruiting for the "In Two Places at Once" Research Project' (8 May 2017, *Conference Inference*)
<https://conferenceinference.wordpress.com/2017/05/08/overwhelming-care-reflections-on-recruiting-for-the-in-two-places-at-once-research-project/>

'Conferences and Caring Responsibilities – Individual Delegates, Multiple Lives' (13 March 2017, *Conference Inference*)
<https://conferenceinference.wordpress.com/2017/03/13/conferences-and-caring-responsibilities-individual-delegates-multiple-lives/>

Events/presentations

'In Two Places at Once: Dissemination Symposium', **University of Warwick**, 12 June 2018.

Project seminar at **CHEER (Centre for Higher Education and Equity Research), University of Sussex**, 30 April 2018, 'In Two Places at Once: Time, Subjectivity and the Academic Profession - Caring Responsibilities and Conference Participation'

Seminar at the **University of Warwick's Centre for Education Studies research methods seminar series**, Wednesday 24 January, 'The Minutiae of Mobility: Researching Academics' Caring Responsibilities in Space and Time'

Presentation at the **Russell Group Equality Forum**, hosted by University of Warwick, London, 15 January 2018: 'Academics with caring responsibilities: institutional obstacles, enablers and responsibilities for fair access to conferences'

Paper at '**Materialities & Mobilities**' Conference, University of Oxford, 8 January: 'In Two Places at Once: Academics with Caring Responsibilities, Conference Mobility, and the Role of Communication Devices'

Lunchtime lecture on 8 November for the **UCL PACT (Parents And Carers Together) network**, London: "'In Two Places at Once": Work, Travel and Caring Responsibilities'

Project workshop at the **FWSA Biennial Conference**, 6-8 September 2017, University of Strathclyde, Glasgow: 'In two places at once: A workshop on conferences and/with caring responsibilities'

Feminisms, Gender and Sexuality Seminar Series, UCL Institute of Education, 5 July 2017, 'In Two Places at Once: Constructing Time and Subjectivity for Research on Academics with Caring Responsibilities'

'In Two Places at Once: Conferences and Caring Responsibilities - Early Findings Event', **London (SRHE premises)**, 4 July 2017